

# Amherst Central Schools

## Distraction Free Schools - Frequently Asked Questions

### Why is this law being implemented now?

Gov. Kathy Hochul's [legislation](#) to create a statewide standard for distraction free schools was approved May 6, 2025. Under this law, New York state schools are required to impose bell-to-bell restrictions on internet-enabled smart phones and devices capable of connecting to the Internet for grades K-12 starting with the 2025-26 school year. The Governor's "[More Learning, Less Scrolling](#)" report includes findings related to cell phone impact on student learning, anxiety, mental health and safety. This report guided the law now in place for schools to follow.

### Is there a Board of Education policy that aligns with the new legislation?

Current policy #7316 Student Use Of Personal Technology will be updated to reflect the regulations outlined in the law. The updated policy is titled, "Use of Internet-Enabled Devices During the School Day". It was approved by the Amherst Central School District Board of Education Aug. 1, 2025.

### When will it start?

The policy becomes effective Sept. 1, 2025 for the start of the 2025-2026 school year.

### How is the district communicating this new requirement to families?

We realize this will be a significant behavior shift for students and parents, particularly at the high school level. We want families to understand the policy and implementation plan so that they can assist their students with this transition. All families, staff and students will receive information about the policy and plan prior to the start of the 2025-26 school year and thereafter on an annual basis prior to the start of school. The district uses a variety of communication channels including email, student handbooks, school newsletters, district website, back to school packets, grade level orientations and school open houses.

Students at all grade levels will receive information on the first day of school and throughout the school year.

### How has the district engaged stakeholders in developing the policy?

Gov. Hochul's legislation allows schools to engage with district stakeholders to assist in developing certain areas of the policy. The district established a 25-member committee of parents, students, teachers, Pupil Personnel Services staff, school principals, district administration, and Board of Education members to gather feedback from all parties impacted by the change. The district emailed all families to request parent and student volunteers to serve on the committee; 50 parents responded and 18 students. A random digitized selection process was done to select the five parent members and five student members (3 ACHS and 2 AMS). The committee met on June 4 and June 11 to develop a draft plan. Additional feedback was collected June 13-20 via a feedback survey emailed to all parents, staff and students to solicit comments on the draft plan. The committee reviewed the feedback survey results at the June 24 committee meeting and made recommendations to the final plan.

### What does Policy #7316 limit?

During the school day ("bell-to-bell") while on school grounds, students are prohibited from using personal Internet-enabled devices such as a smartphone, tablet, smartwatch or other device capable of connecting to the Internet and enabling the user to access content on the Internet including social media applications. Other device examples include, but are not limited to, laptop, fitbit, smart glasses or other wearable device, MP3 player, iPod, and iPad. *It includes all devices capable of being connected to the internet.* Students may not have continuous possession of their devices throughout the school day and the plan outlines the methods of storage.

**Does this policy include school-issued devices?**

No, school-issued Chromebook instructional devices are allowed.

**What does bell-to-bell mean?**

Bell-to-bell is the time from the first bell before homeroom/homebase to the last period dismissal bell. It includes all instructional and non-instructional times (ie. homeroom/homebase periods, lunch, recess, study halls, passing time).

**When will my child be able to check their cell phone messages?**

The policy covers bell-to-bell so your child can access a cell phone at the beginning of the day before the first bell and at the end of the day following the dismissal bell.

**Will students be allowed to use cell phones on overnight trips and field trips?**

Use of cell phones during overnight trips and field trips is at the discretion of teacher/building administration.

**Are students allowed to use wireless earbuds or headphones?**

Within school buildings, wired earbuds and/or headphones (which connect to a standard 3.5mm jack) may be used with teacher or administrative approval when connected to a district device. In classrooms, use is permitted solely for educational purposes with permission from the classroom teacher; in designated common areas or study periods, use must remain appropriate and aligned with each school's guidelines. Wireless earbuds are not permitted during the school day from bell to bell.

**What if my child does not use his locker at the high school or even know where it is?**

The high school will provide information to students about locker locations and assistance to help them with using a combination lock, if they need it. All middle and high school students will visit lockers at the start of the school day to store their device and at the end of the day to retrieve it.

**How will the policy be enforced and what are the consequences?**

The District is prohibited from suspending a student solely for accessing internet-enabled devices in violation of this policy. The District is allowed to develop disciplinary consequences for non-compliance regarding personal electronic devices which will be included in Building-Level Student Handbooks and the District Code of Conduct. Students will be reminded of the policy regularly and consistently, especially at the start of school and after returning from breaks.

The formal progressive discipline procedures are as follows:

**High and Middle School Level:**

- First offense: The device will be confiscated and returned to the student at the end of the day.
- Second offense: The device will be confiscated and will be returned to the student at the end of the day upon parent/guardian request. One detention will be assigned.
- Third offense: The device will be confiscated and will be returned only to the parent/guardian. Two detentions will be assigned.
- Fourth offense: The device will be confiscated and will be returned only to the parent/guardian. This is a violation of the [ACSD Code of Conduct](#) Section 6B. One day of In-School Suspension will be assigned.
- Refusal to comply with a staff member's directive regarding cell phone use constitutes insubordination and or gross insubordination and will be addressed in accordance with the [ACSD Code of Conduct](#); a cell phone policy violation becomes insubordination when a student willfully fails to follow a direct instruction from staff.

**Elementary Level:**

- First offense: Verbal warning to return device to backpack.
- Second offense: The device will be confiscated and will be returned to the student at the end of the day upon parent/guardian request.
- Third offense: The device will be confiscated and will be returned only to the parent/guardian. Student will engage in reflective activity (ie: write/present about the importance of following directions)
- Refusal to comply with a staff member's directive regarding cell phone use constitutes insubordination and or gross insubordination and will be addressed in accordance with the [ACSD Code of Conduct](#); a cell phone policy violation becomes insubordination when a student willfully fails to follow a direct instruction from staff.

### **How can parents contact their child during the school day?**

Parents or persons in parental relation may call the school's main office. The office staff can relay messages to the student or call the student to the office to speak with their parent or person in parental relation. The school district will notify parents in writing of the communication protocol at the beginning of each school year and upon enrollment.

Amherst Central High School Main Office: 716-362-8100

Amherst Middle School Main Office: 716-362-7100

Smallwood Drive Elementary School Main Office: 716-362-2100

Windermere Boulevard Elementary School Main Office: 716-362-4100

### **How can a student contact a parent during the school day?**

To contact a parent, students may use the phone in the Main Office, Attendance Office, Nurses Office for any medical issues, Student Services/Counseling Office and in the classroom (with teacher permission).

### **Will teachers and staff be using cell phones during the school day?**

The policy is for student use of personal electronic devices. Teachers and staff members will model positive behavior with personal electronic devices away during instructional time, unless being used for instructional purposes.

### **Will I be able to contact my child if there is a school-wide emergency?**

During a school-wide emergency, no outside communication between students and parents is allowed, as this could compromise the safety of students and staff. In an emergency situation, building administrators will follow District and Building Level Safety Plans. The focus is on keeping all students safe and working with law enforcement or emergency responders. Students are expected to listen, without distraction, to directions from teachers/building administration during an emergency. The District will notify parents, when it is safe to do so, in an emergency situation.

District Safety Plans implemented during emergencies, depending on the threat level, can include:

- Shelter in Place: used to shelter students and staff inside the building while instruction continues
- Hold-In-Place: used to limit movement of students and staff while dealing with short term emergencies while instruction continues
- Evacuate: used to evacuate students and staff from the building
- Secure Lockout: used to secure building and grounds during incidents that post an imminent concern outside of school, while instruction continues
- Lockdown: used to secure school buildings and grounds during incidents that pose an immediate threat of violence in or around the school

**With permitted exceptions, can students still be required to store their devices throughout the day or will they be allowed to use their phone however they want because of their exception?**

Even if a student demonstrates a need for an exception to the law, they may still be required to store their devices during the day. The law says the policy may authorize student use of an internet-enabled device for specific reasons: a specific educational purpose, where necessary for the management of a student's healthcare, in an emergency, for translation services, on a case-by-case basis for the care and wellbeing of a family member, or where required by law. These exceptions do not automatically provide students unrestricted access to devices throughout the entire day.

**Will the Student Handbooks include information about Distraction-Free Schools?**

Yes. Parents and students should read those documents (they are posted online at [www.amherstschoools.org](http://www.amherstschoools.org)) and be aware of the information regarding cell phones.

**Are there state reporting requirements related to Policy #7316?**

Yes. Starting Sept. 1, 2026 and annually thereafter, the district is required to publish a report on its website detailing enforcement of this policy within the District in the prior school year. The report will include non-identifiable demographic data of students who have faced disciplinary action for non-compliance and analysis of any demographic disparities in enforcement of the policy.

**What resources are available for parents to track First Student school buses?**

Starting in September 2025, parents can track First Student bus routes by using the FirstView bus tracking app which is available for the large buses only; it is not available for students riding small buses. The app is available through the Apple app store or Google Play store or by visiting [myfirstview.com](http://myfirstview.com). Instructions on how to use the app with the school code can be found on the [Transportation webpage](#).

*Updated 7/29/25*